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FARMER COOPERATIVES AND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

by

*W. M. Bost

Thank you for this invitation to meet with you for a short time and especially for this opportunity to talk with you about a subject dear to each of us -- "Cooperative." This is an important part of the name for the organization we both represent. Your name, for example, may be Jones County Cooperative while ours is Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service.

We have many things in common other than our names. Our primary objective and purposes are one and the same, as we both put service to people above other things. Our organization predates most of yours in this state, and we are proud of the fact that history shows a long record of Cooperative Extension Service efforts directed to organizing and nurturing farmer cooperatives as they moved through some early lean years. We are still happy to have a part in the organization and promotion of farmer cooperative endeavors.

Cooperative Extension and farmer cooperatives have progressed a long way since the early 20's and lean 30's. Have we really stopped to count our blessings and take stock of ourselves? We should. Otherwise we may not realize the real importance of the Co-op to which we belong and for which we and those before us struggles so hard to achieve.

*Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Mississippi State University, at Cooperative Business Management Institute for Directors and Management, Jackson, Mississippi, January 29-30, 1964.

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There are many today who do not realize how important farmer cooperatives are to them - as farmers, as consumers, or as citizens. Because they don't know, they don't care how these organizations are fairing. In like manner, many of our citizens today know far too little about our Land-Grant College system with its off-campus educational arm - the Cooperative Extension Service. The Land-Grant College system here in this nation is being studied by people from all over the world. It represents a search by these nations for some better way to promote education both at the college and for off-campus groups. And, as you are aware, other nations of the world are also studying your own farmer cooperative organizations.

Just a few weeks ago we were visited by a Korean who occupies a high level position in the agricultural division of the Korean government. This gentleman was interested in both our Land-Grant College system and in your cooperative organizational system. After the Korean completed his visit on the campus, Dr. Johnston brought him here to Jackson for a conference with staff members in the fertilizer division of Mississippi Federated Cooperatives.

As I think further into the similarities of our two organizations, I think of the letters in the word "Co-op." Each letter in this word means something to me that I would like to share with you.

C -- The letter "C" represents the first letter of thousands of words - many of which reflect something of the purposes and

objectives of both farmer cooperatives and cooperative extension. "Champion" - one such word - is defined as "one who acts or speaks in behalf of a person or a cause--." Certainly, farmer cooperatives have long spoken for and acted in behalf of their farmer clients in an effort to give them bargaining power for both purchasing and marketing. This enables farmer clients to obtain higher incomes for their families. Cooperative Extension champions this same cause of the farmers by encouraging participation in group action for the common good of all such as you provide. In addition, Cooperative Extension puts much of its resources into educational work designed to help farmers increase efficiency and reduce cost so that a higher level of living for all of our farmers can be achieved. And so, a very important function of your organization and mine is to champion the cause of farmers.

O - The letter "O" could stand for organize, or order, or officers - all of which you and we must have to be successful in our effort to serve the farmers to whom we owe our allegiance. To champion a cause, to act in behalf, or to obtain any worthwhile accomplishment, requires a well organized cooperative with well qualified and enthusiastic officers who can bring order into the effort.

You have demonstrated your interest in providing quality officers by involving them in this training workshop. Some of you are essentially "non-pay" employees of your local cooperative. You serve somewhat as voluntary leaders and workers for your cooperative. In like manner, the Cooperative Extension program is

based on voluntary leadership assistance in both youth and adult programs. Cooperative Extension feels that one of its greatest and most valued achievements is that of leadership development and training for the rural people of this state.

A second "O" in the word "Co-op" -- Don't let it mean "obsolete." This is something that we all must constantly guard against. Our attitudes, our methods, and our techniques, just the same as our materials and equipment, can become obsolete. Such obsolescence is taking the "lives" of many otherwise good organizations each year. I would like to commend you again on your interest in this workshop. I know that it will provide you with many tools that will be useful in your fight against obsolescence.

P -- The letter "P" could stand for pacesetter, or pioneer, or push, or persistence - but I would rather associate it with "people." You and I both are providing service, educational or otherwise, to "people." Our objective -- the end product -- is people.

All of our actions are designed to serve as means to attain this end -- service to and development of people. You do not help a farmer to sell his pecans or his cotton with a primary objective of clearing out storage space. No, you're really interested in what you can do to help the farmer obtain maximum income from his farm products so that the added income may be available to the farm family.

In summary, let us keep in mind that we have no right to

existence except to the degree that we provide a service to our people. We must "champion" their cause. We must serve as good officers and provide order and the type organization necessary to be certain that we do not become obsolete in our attitudes, our methods, our techniques, and our service to the people to whom we have responsibility.

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